

DAVID ASBELL

*Executive Director, Lobero Theatre
Santa Barbara, California*



It was almost exactly 20 years ago that David Asbell accepted the position of executive director at the Lobero Theatre. The venerable structure on East Canon Perdido Street was on the verge of one of its all-time least successful ventures, an ill-fated attempt at establishing a professional repertory theater. If it had gone forward, it would undoubtedly have bankrupted the Lobero within a matter of months. Asbell, freshly arrived from Atlanta, already knew something about Santa Barbara — he had grown up working in his father's

orchid greenhouse on the Mesa — and he knew a lot more about the performing arts. A veteran of stage management with more than a decade's experience with the Atlanta Ballet and earlier with a Shakespeare festival in Birmingham, Alabama, he not only brought the kind of savvy that only comes from working backstage, but he also brought a profound vision of what the Lobero Theatre could become: Santa Barbara's beating creative heart. With characteristic humility, he points to the venue's 600-seat capacity as the key to its success, but those of us privileged to spend many captivating evenings there know better. By establishing a welcoming atmosphere and by being open to a creative team that includes such area luminaries as Hale Milgrim, Dianne Vapnek, Peggie Jones, and Stephen Cloud, Asbell has turned the Lobero into what we need most, in good times and bad: a blessed community of like-minded people, alive to the arts and ready to listen and share the love of great music, ideas, dance, and theater.

By Paul Wellman

